

# From cooks to culinary artists

## Stuttgart-area food service personnel learn finer points of their profession

Story and photos by Mildred Green

**F**rom craftsmanship to artistry – and from precision to power tools – a November culinary arts workshop on Kelley Barracks gave four Stuttgart-area food service personnel hands-on experience with the finer points of their profession.

The class, which was taught by the 6th Area Support Group's food advisor, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Robert Sparks, took the cooks through the steps necessary to create such aesthetic delicacies as ice carvings, salt dough cornucopias and baskets, Bible cakes with rolled fondant, blown sugar fruit and gingerbread houses.

"This was definitely a learning experience," said Sgt. Michael Ramey, one of the course participants.

### A team effort

The small class size emphasized collaboration. "It took more of a team effort to get things going," said Sgt. First Class Danny White. "We knew what it required to work together and make a better product."

At the end of the workshop the cooks took their products to their dining facilities. And although the facilities would be competing for the best-decorated hall, the students still helped each other during the workshop.

"We're not in it for the competition, but in it as a team," said Spc. Kellan Boh.

On at least one occasion, the team came in on a Saturday to finish a project, Sparks said.

### Hard work pays off

Sparks, who has been competing in culinary arts competitions for about 19 years, said he was pleased with the quality of cooks who were sent to him.

"These guys were interested in learning," Sparks said. "They didn't mind working hard or me pushing them hard."

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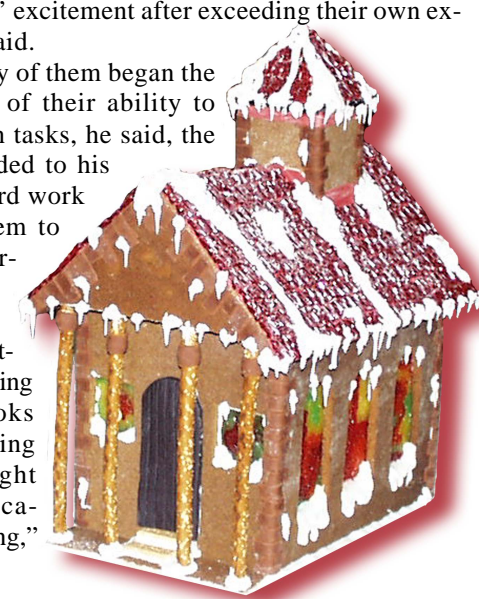
**Chief Warrant Officer 3 Robert Sparks**  
6th Area Support Group Food Advisor

Student Frank Valdes admitted that there were some frustrating times, but "you just start over again," he said. "It will come out good eventually."

Sparks said the highlight of the workshop for him was seeing the cooks' excitement after exceeding their own expectations, he said.

Though many of them began the training unsure of their ability to complete certain tasks, he said, the students responded to his training with hard work that enabled them to exceed their perceived capabilities.

"I get great satisfaction from seeing the young cooks produce something that they thought they were not capable of producing," Sparks said.

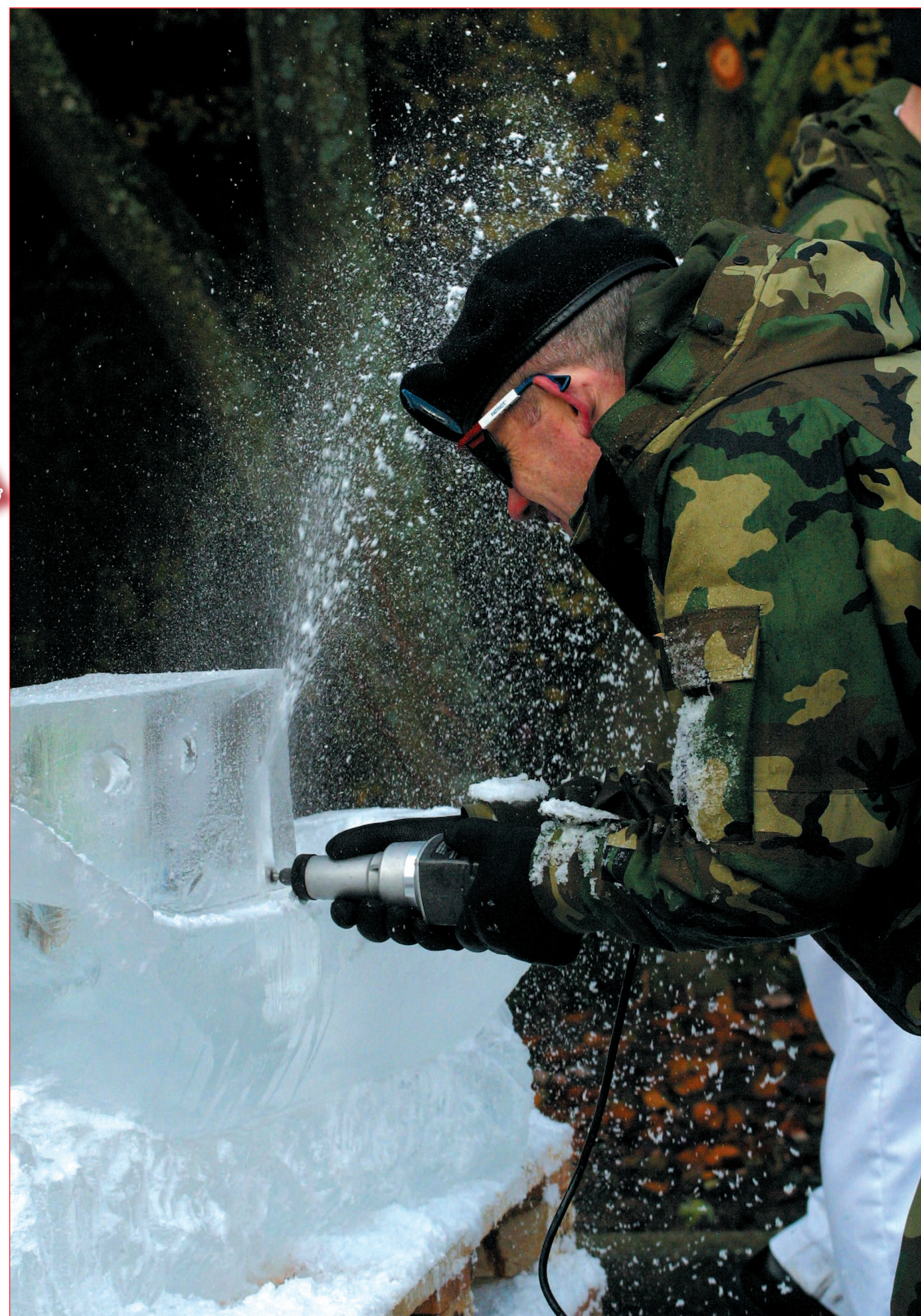


Sgt. Michael Ramey creates a horn out of salt dough during the weeklong culinary arts class on Stuttgart's Kelley Barracks.



[Above] The Patch Dining Facility's Frank Valdes gets up close and personal with a cake created in the shape of an open Bible. The Kelley Barracks culinary arts class gave students hands-on experience with a variety of skills related to their profession.

[Left] Spc. Kellan Boh puts a few finishing touches on his gingerbread house during the culinary arts class. In addition to such edible delicacies as this house, the students also learned how to create "eyes only" displays such as ice sculptures.



Chief Warrant Officer 3 Robert Sparks, the food advisor for the 6th Area Support Group, blasts into a block of ice that is in the process of becoming a boat. An experienced ice carver and culinary competitor, Sparks guided four Stuttgart-area students through a weeklong look at the finer points of the craft.